THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 1979

Head of F.B.I. Reverses Decision To Oust Agent for Break-In Role

By ANTHONY MARRO
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 26 — William H. Webster, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, today reversed an earlier decision and announced that he would not dismiss a supervisor who had been involved in a series of allegedly illegal break-ins, wiretaps and mail openings that were committed in a hunt for radical fugitives.

Mr. Webster, in a letter to Attorney General Griffin B. Bell, said he was modifying his original decision because he had since become persuaded that the supervisor, Horace Beckwith, had fully cooperated with Justice Department investigators who were looking into the case.

He said one of the Justice Department attorneys involved in the investigation had said that Mr. Beckwith's cooperation had been "crucial to its success." As a result, he said, he felt that a modification of the original decision was not only fair, but also might "serve as an inducement to others to cooperate" in future investigations.

Associated Press

William H. Webster

Mr. Beckwith was not mentioned by name in the letter to Mr. Bell, nor in a statement that Mr. Webster released to the news media. But Justice Department officials immediately confirmed that Mr. Beckwith was the supervisor involved, and said that, rather than being dismissed, he would be reduced in grade and transferred from headquarters to one of the 59 field offices.

Supervisor in New York

At the time of the break-ins in the early 1970's, Mr. Beckwith was a supervisor with Squad 47 in New York, which conducted most of the break-ins. Like most members of that squad, he was given immunity from prosecution in return for his testimony in the investigation, which ended in the indictment of L. Patrick Gray 3d, the bureau's former Acting Director, and two other former top officials.

Mr. Beckwith was one of four persons selected for administrative discipline by Mr. Webster, however, because his actions were not taken as a result of specific orders from higher-ups in the bureau.

Of the four, two were given letters of censure and Mr. Beckwith and a colleague were told they would be dismissed.

The decision by Mr. Webster to modify his punishment means that Mr. Beckwith will be demoted from a Grade 14 to a Grade 13, but will be able to continue in the bureau and retire with full benefits when he reaches age 50, in about two-and-a-half years.